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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION: OFFICE TREATMENT OF NAMES

Geographical Names Data Compilation Program of the United States of America (Domestic)

Paper submitted by the United States of America**

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Geographical Names Data Compilation Program of the United States of America (Domestic)

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The attached map conveys the status of the domestic geographical names data compilation program in the United States. The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is being compiled in two distinct phases. The first phase is complete for States and areas under United States jurisdiction, and entailed the collection of most feature names printed on the 1:24,000-scale topographic maps published by the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Forest Service as well as the charts of the National Ocean Service. The second phase is a long-term project to gather additional names information from official State and local materials, as well as a wide variety of historical documents. This project is being accomplished on a State-by-State basis.

Traditionally, when a state file had completed all phases of data compilation, that State's volume of the National Gazetteer of the United States (conventional version) would be scheduled for publication. That aspect of this program has been temporarily suspended pending review and evaluation since these data are readily available on compact disk and at the domestic geographic names website on the internet (please refer to the Digital Gazetteer and Internet papers).

The methodology and procedures were developed so that geographical names data would be collected systematically without violating Federal naming policies (U.S. Geological Survey Circular 1011, Orth & Payne, 1987). Specifically, source materials are approved by the project manager and then examined in a pre-defined order. Procedures for recording data, and resolving conflicting information are clearly defined and provided to each data compilation contractor. Software for recording information was designed so that a wide variety of potential errors are avoided including the determination of feature type; recording geographical coordinates and map references; elevation data; and recording administrative divisions associated with features.

The GNIS staff receives a large volume of data in electronic format on a monthly basis, and uses a suite of software to further analyze and verify the information. Finally, a small percentage of information is actually verified against the source document to assure that established procedures are being followed. Once all aspects of quality assurance are complete, the information is submitted to the database and is immediately available for use by Federal agencies, and to the user community through the Internet.

The dynamic nature of a program of applied toponomy requires a strong maintenance program to assure quality and integrity, as well as the most current information. A network has been established of Federal agencies to assure that the database is maintained accordingly. These agencies use software designed specifically for this purpose, and the GNIS staff apply the same procedures of quality assurance as those used in the data compilation program.